

## CHAPTER IV

### ELEMENTARY / PRIMARY EDUCATION IN WEST BENGAL

The policy prescription of primary education in West Bengal has been a departure from the policies and programmes pursued by the Indian state for the development of primary education. The principal thrust of the policy of primary education as identified by the state of West Bengal has been on the qualitative improvement and the overall growth of primary education with justice. The thrust is not only on the upgrading of class room, extension of existing provisions of creation of new primary schools but also in creating an optimum ambience for teacher-students interactions as well as a congenial socio-economic environment with an honest political will to develop basic education with the participation of the community. The West Bengal's thrust of primary education is based on policy of decentralization by establishing primary school networking in the remotest corner of the state. This state has taken effort of diversification of the issues of primary education under a diversified management system to address heterogeneous back ground of primary school students by including panchayats to play their role. Optimum utilization of all the available resources of all round development of primary education has been a principal area of such policy. In pursuance of this policy, different action programmes have been undertaken by the state government to bring basic elementary education to the door step of the people. The action programmes so far undertaken include increase in enrolment, increase of daily attendance in the school, increase in retention rate, improvement of the quality of primary education, more stress on the curriculum and syllabus to make it more child centric and joyful vis-a-vis change in the method of teaching, improving the opportunity of schooling facility to girls, S.C., S.T. and other disadvantaged sections of the society, improving the school building along with its environment, more supervision-inspection, betterment of teachers' capacity and involvement, increase in community participation, increase in involvement of women, development of EMIS, optimal use of present infra-structure and variable schools timing to suit the need of children.<sup>(1)</sup>

Complying the Constitutional directives, the primary education in West Bengal has been made free for all. The language of instruction at the primary level has been the mother tongue of the child. In consideration of the recommendations of

different education commissions as well as other pedagogy and psychological factors, the policy of no detention has been introduced in primary schools. All the text books are supplied free of cost to all students of all recognized primary schools. To increase the retention rate certain incentive schemes have been introduced. School dress is provided to 100% S.T. and S.T. girls and 20% of the girls of economically backward families. Moreover, mid-day meal has been arranged for every child of primary school.

In order to ensure the total development, school sports for the primary students have been organised. It is organised at the circle level followed by district level and finally the state level. Another important issue of primary education in the West Bengal is that the local panchayat bodies are provided with funds, under different development schemes for construction of school building and such other extension activities. Involvement of the panchayat bodies in school management and administration has made the school a part of the community. This peoples' participatory method has generated a kind of awareness that the school requires to be nursed carefully. If it is so nursed students admitted schools can be retained upto the end of primary school education. <sup>(2)</sup>

A logical conclusion seems ineluctable that the Left Front rule in West Bengal for the last quarter of the century has made a considerable departure from the erstwhile policies on primary education taken by the Congress ruled government. The path breaking policy on primary education undertaken by the Left Front Government has evoked a mixed reaction. Primarily, such policy has expedited. The process of democratisation of education with its extension to the grass-root, as a result, an enormous number of first generation learner has evolved out who could never think of having the opportunity of getting education at the primary level. On the other hand, such a tremendous quantitative expansion has endangered the qualitative perspective of general primary education which has given birth a kind of apathy in the minds of middle class people who are becoming averse to state directed primary education. Such an aversion has given rise to mushroom growth of nursery schools. This parallel system of primary education has been able to continue primarily because of two reasons :

- a) incapacity of the state government to address the growing demands of primary schools and

- b) delinking primary education from secondary school education and by withdrawing the system of detention at the primary level, the state government has not been able to attract the aspiring middle class people to get admitted in the state directed primary schools.

In addition to it, since there is no compulsion to get once's child admitted and passed through primary schools of the state, government has implicitly provided a kind of free licensing to the hand of middle class to go for the so called apparently sophisticated primary schools of urban nature. Despite criticism, one has to admit the fact that the left front rule in state of West Bengal has been consisted enough to contribute a reasonable budget allocation for the development of primary education. By replacing the 'trickle down' model of development, the Left Front Government since 1996, adopted an alternative development model called 'growth with equity' which ushered in a new dimension to the socio-economic milieu of rural West Bengal. Land reforms, operation Barga, revitalization of panchayat, introduction of elected panchayat bodies of different tiers with direct political party representation have, ultimately, transformed the chemistry of rural life and have enabled the process of extension of the social roots of the newly enchanted and empowered rural political democracy. The old eutherian rural structure principally based on material being and caste consideration started crumbling to experience the emergence of a new kind of political elite supported by majority of rural population at the rural universe. The landed gentry, landed property class, the village money lenders have been almost pushed to the wall by the newly emerging political elites with sufficiently organised political supports. This new dispensation has brought about some important changes by enhancing the space of development of indexes of physical quality of life.<sup>(3)</sup>

Education being the principal dimension of basic human development has been attended to by this newly emerging political dispensation. Total literacy movement in the state has brought about awareness and perception in the minds of rural parents that education is the principal force of liberation from the sickles of ignorance and prejudices of life. Total literacy campaign has also empowered the women to take the leadership position and demand more education for their children. Such perception has ushered hopes in the minds of grass-root level people to achieve universalization of elementary education. It has been commonly recognized that education is the most liberating force. Despite efforts, it has been a ground reality that even after all this

important changes, West Bengal's rank 9 in the matter of percentage of literacy while comparing with other states of India. Not only the honest political will, but also the need of the hour is to involve people in the overall literacy campaign with a commitment to take it as a social movement. With this background in mind relevant data and statistics can be portrait on the growth of primary education in West Bengal. Such data and statistics when analysed can well provide a scope to understand the ground reality.

**Table 15. Growth of Primary Education in West Bengal**

Year	No. of Primary Schools	Enrolment (in Lakh )
1947	13,950	12.31
1978	42,659	57.27
1986	48,456	68.83
1993	51,021	85.06
1998	51,021	89.07

*Source : Based on Ministry of Human Resource Development Data.*

It is seen from the above table that the growth of primary schools over a period of fifty four years is 3,65 times and a slow progress for last seven years But the enrolment status of the primary students has increased for last fifty four year by more than nine times. However, for last seven years provision of construction of additional classroom has generated instead of forming new schools.

**Table 16. District-wise No. of Primary Schools**

1.	Bankura	-	3350	11.	Howrah	-	2210
2.	Birbhum	-	2475	12.	Jalpaiguri	-	1832
3.	Burdwan	-	3779	13.	Malda	-	1968
4.	Calcutta	-	1348	14.	Midnapore	-	9514
5.	Cooch Behar	-	1684	15.	Murshidabad	-	3050
6.	Darjeeling	-	694	16.	Nadia	-	2627
7.	Uttar Dinajpur	-	1276	17.	Purulia	-	2934
8.	Dakshin ..	-	1301	18.	24-Pgn (N)	-	4175
9.	Siliguri	-	422	19.	24-Pgn (S)	-	3729
10.	Hooghly	-	2658				
						<b>Total</b>	<b><u>51120</u></b>

The above figure depicts the fact that Darjeeling is the district of having lowest number of primary schools and Midnapore, the district of having highest number of primary schools. It is surprising that the number of primary schools in Calcutta is only 1343 but the number is quite enough for neighbouring districts of Calcutta which indicates that alternate schooling system has managed the crisis.<sup>(5)</sup>

**Table 17. Class-wise Enrolment of Students in Primary Schools**

Year	Enrolment in Class					
	I	II	III	IV	V	Total
1973	25,81,802	11,22,058	7,71,632	5,61,303	4,25,114	54,61,939
1978	25,16,998	11,36,358	8,90,401	6,56,930	5,76,904	57,77,591
1986	24,19,036	13,62,992	11,55,457	9,73,622	9,22,804	68,83,911
1993	28,61,274	17,82,572	14,91,783	12,55,756	11,14,805	85,06,190
2001	33,84,360	23,31,314	19,26,005	16,19,646	13,46,754	105,10,779

*Source : Directorate of School Education, W.B*

### TEACHERS' PROFILE

Minimum qualification of a primary school teacher is Madhyamik or equivalent examination. He is required to have a pass certificate from a Primary Teachers' Training Institute (PTTI). The scale of pay of a primary school teacher is Rs. 3350-6300/- which at the initial stage along with other allowances comes to around Rs. 5393/-. Those who join the school without a training certificate are provided with the training in a PTTI during their service with full pay.<sup>(6)</sup>

There are 57 number of PTTIs all over West Bengal with intake capacity of 5582. The district-wise break-up is shown in Table - 18.

**Table-18. District-wise distribution of Primary Teachers' Training Institutes with intake capacity**

District	Government Nos.	Govt. Sponsored Nos.	Private Aided Nos.	Total Nos.	Capacity Nos.
Coochbehar	1	1	—	2	270
Darjeeling	1	1	—	2	150
Dinajpur(N)	2	—	—	2	230
Dinajpur (S)	1	—	—	1	80
Hoogly	2	2	—	4	470
Howrah	2	1	—	3	280
Jalpaiguri	2	—	—	2	210
Malda	1	—	—	1	150
Midnapore	5	—	—	5	445
Murshidabad	1	1	—	2	220
Nadia	5	—	—	5	465
Purulia	1	1	—	2	140
24-Pag (N)	3	1	—	4	385
24-Pag (S)	1	3	—	4	242
Calcutta	1	1	5	7	620
Total	35	17	5	57	5,582

*Source : Directorate of School Education, W.B*

### DPEP in West Bengal

In pursuance of the National Policy on Education (NPE) and Programme of Action (PoA) emphasizing the importance of decentralised planning and management of education at all level by involving people, the state of West Bengal has taken steps to set up structures for decentralised planing and management and such structure has been given top priority. The priority based principles of decentralised education management include principles such as,

- i) Evolving a long term planning and its management perspective of education and its integration with the country's development and man power needs;
- ii) Decentralisation and the creation of a spirit of autonomy for educational institutions;
- iii) Giving pri- eminence to people's involvement , including association of non-governmental agencies and voluntary efforts;
- iv) Inducting more women in the planning and management of education
- and v) Establishing the principle of accountability in relation to given objectives and norms .

It has already been stated that the National Policy on Education has enriched the role and responsibility of both the Centre and State in regard to education with a meaningful partnership between them. The objective is to reinforce the national integrative character of education. At the national level, the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) has emerged as a very effective catalytic centre between the Centre and State to evolve out a consensus on the major policy issues in the field of human resource development. It has been enriched that the State Government should established State Board of Education on the lines of the Central Board. In West Bengal, Pachim Banga Rajya Prathamik Siksha Unnayan Sanstha (West Bengal Primary Education Development Board) has been created to respond positively to the voice of the centre for creating State level agency for cementing the Centre - State institutional partnership in the field of Education. The NPE envisaged that such state level agency should percolate down to the level of district and even to the level of village.<sup>(7)</sup>

To materialise the universalisation of elementary education, a centrally sponsored programme named District Primary Education Programme has been launched. This is a centrally sponsored, externally funded programme aiming at universalisation of primary education through universal access, enrolment and retention with a substantial improvement in the existing level of quality of education. It is presently running in 15 states in India. In West Bengal, it is running in 5 districts, viz. Cooch-Bihar, Murshidabad, Birbhum, Bankura and South 24-Parganas. The following tables give some of the important characteristics of these districts.

**Table 19. Figure at a Glance**

	Bankura	Birbhum	Cooch- Behar	Murshi- dabad	24-Pgs (S)	W.B.
Population ( in lakh )	27.99	25.56	21.58	47.34	47.08	67.98
Sex Ratio( Females per 1000 males )	948	946	934	945	929	917
Decennial Growth rate of population	17.88	21.96	21.82	28.04	30.08	24.55
Density of Population per sq. km.	407	562	637	889	573	76.
Female Literacy Rate ( % of total Female Population )	30.81	30.21	27.71	23.62	32.73	38.95
Girls' enrolment in classes I-V, 1993 (% of total enrolment)	44.03	41.81	44.94	43.07	45.96	-----

Source : Census of India, Series-26.

It is seen from the above table that the women's literacy rate in each of the selected districts is less than the national average which is 39.40. It needs mentioning that at present, out of these five districts, Bankura and Birbhum have already attained more than 80% literacy and have been declared as total literate districts by the Govt. of India. The other three districts are moving fast towards the goal of total literacy and are expected to attain the same shortly as the total literacy drive is going on full swing.<sup>(8)</sup> The West Bengal District Primary Education Programme (WBDPEP) is being funded by Department for International Development, UK which provides for 85 % of the funds while the State Government provides the matching grant of rest 15 %. Through the preparations and pre-project activities started in 1994-95, DPEP was formally launched in West Bengal in 1996-97. The total project cost for 5 districts is about Rs. 200 crores which at the end of the 7th year project period will stand at Rs. 266 crores. The ceiling of project cost per district is Rs. 40 crores, out of which a maximum of 24 % can be spent on civil construction (basically building support to

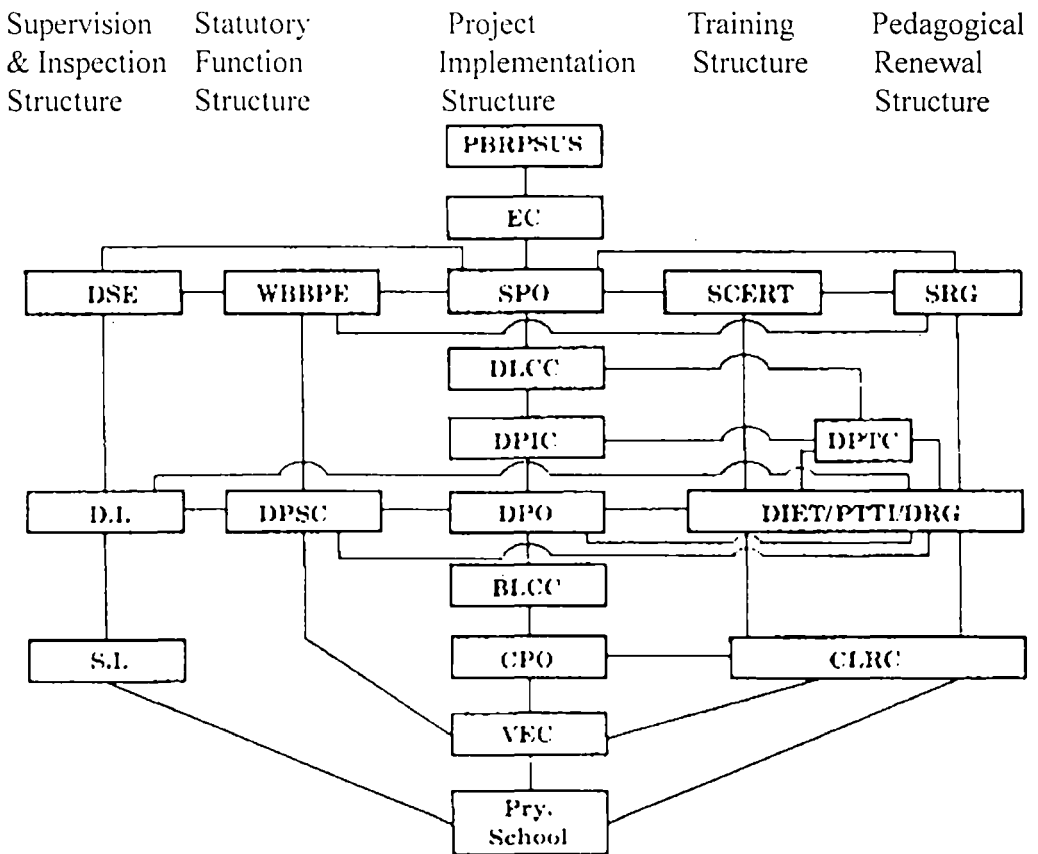


primary schools) and 6 % on administrative cost. Rest 70 % is to be spent mainly on access, retention and quality improvement intervention as planned by each district . West Bengal has come under DPEP during its phase II and hence is referred to as a DPEP II state.<sup>(9)</sup>

Five more districts viz. Jalpaiguri, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur, Malda & Purulia have been brought under DPEP. Pre-project activities and planning are going on in these districts and it is expected that DPEP will be formally extended to this districts some time during 2002-2003 AD. The criteria for selection of districts are low female literacy rate (districts having lower female literacy rate than the state average) and success of total literacy campaigning. All the 10 districts selected so far have a lower female literacy rate as compared to the state average i.e., 46%. The DPEP as an action oriented and goal oriented programme is based on a well formulated strategy principally governed by certain care principles such as : a) mobilisation for universalisation of elementary education by activating village education committees, teachers, parents and guardians of the learners and linking up with effort under the total literacy campaign ; b) planning for overall primary education and not merely primary schooling ; c) coverage of all qualitative aspects such as school effectiveness, text books, teachers training and improvement in simple reading and learning skills; d) convergence of services such as primary education, primary health and such other basic needs to provide synergistic development ; e) provision for training to improve teacher motivation and class-room transaction and also management of education ; f) openness to innovations which throw up new solutions and once tested can be scaled up, or aborted if unsuccessful; g) a marked gender focus to provide for improvement in access, retention and achievement levels of girls education and to permit gender sensitivity through all aspects of DPEP planning ; h) creation of provision for management of change to improve the system of DPEP ; i) evaluation, monitoring and research are interactive and supportive of DPEP.

To implement DPEP, a registered society named Pachim Banga Rajya Prathamik Siksha Unnayan Sanstha (West Bengal State Primary Education Development Agency) has been created which is having with a Governing council with honourable Chief Minister as its President and honourable Minister-in-charge of School Education as its Working President. The council is represented by members drawn from all the development departments of State Government, West Bengal Board of

Primary Education (WBBPE), the State Council of Education, Research and Training (SCERT), Directorate of School Education, Zilla Parishads, District Primary School Councils (DPSC), Non Governmental Organisation (NGO), academicians and a bonafied representatives of Government of India. The State Project Director (SPD) is the Member -Secretary of the Governing Council. There is also an Executive Committee under the Sanstha which is headed by the Secretary, School Education Department. The State Project Director is the Member - Secretary of the that Executive Committee. The committee is the highest policy making agency of the Sanstha. The State Project Office works through different cells which include Planning & Administrative Cell, Finance & Accounts Cell, Civil Works Cell, Teachers Training Cell, Management and Information system (MIS) Cell, Community Mobilization Cell, Alternative Schooling Cell, Integrated Education for Disabled (IED) Cell, Women Development & Gender Cell, Distance Education Cell, Media & Documentation Cell and Expansion Cell. All these cells are headed by a Cell-in-Charge who is retired Govt. employees, serving Govt. servants, consultants, deputations, etc. The organisation structure of DPEP in West Bengal may be represented as under.<sup>(10)</sup>



**Abbreviations Used :**

PBRPSUS	:	Pachim Banga Rajya Prathamik Siksha Unnayan Sanstha
EC	:	Executive Committee (of the Sanstha)
DSE	:	Directorate of School Education
WBBPE	:	West Bengal Board of Primary Education
DLCC	:	District Level Coordination Committee
DPIC	:	District Project Implementation Committee
DPTC	:	District Pedagogy & Training Committee
D.I.	:	District Inspector of Schools (Primary Education)
DPSC	:	District Primary School Council
BLCC	:	Block Level Coordination Committee (MLCC or Municipal Level Coordination Committee is its equivalent in urban areas)
DIET	:	District Institute of Education & Training
PTTI	:	Primary Teachers' Training Institute
SRG	:	State Resource Group
DRG	:	District Resource Group
CLRC	:	Circle Resource Centre
CPO	:	Circle Project Office
VEC	:	Village Education Committee (WEC or Ward Education Committee is its equivalent in urban areas)

The State Project Director works through the District Project Office, each of such office has been set up in each DPEP district. The District Project Office is headed by the District Project officer (DPO). DPOs are officers of the West Bengal Education Service in the rank of D.I. of School or Additional D.I. of Schools. He had one Addl. DPO in the rank of A.I. of Schools and three Dy. DPOs in the rank of S.I. of Schools under him. The D.I. of Schools ( Primary Education ) of the district is the ex-officio District Project Coordinator. District Project Office has an almost similar set up as SPO, having various functional cells including that for Civil Works, Teachers' Training, Management & Information System (MIS), Community Mobilization (CM), Alternative Schooling (AS), Integrated Education for Disabled (IED) cell, Women Development (WD), Pedagogy, etc. are in operation in districts.<sup>(11)</sup>

There are three committees at the district level for performing different functions under WBDPEP and to ensure strong convergence of activities and proper coordination between different agencies concerned as part of strategy to achieve the goal of universalisation of primary education.

1. District Level Coordination Committee (DLCC) is an apex decision-making body with Sabhadhipati as its Chairman and District Magistrate as its Vice-Chairman. Dis-

trict Project Officer (DPO) of DPEP is its Member-Secretary. Besides, there are several members, such as, ADM, Chairman DPSC, Chairman of a Municipality, Karmadhyaksha, SSS, ZP, Principal of PTTI, one representatives of Paridarshak Samity, two women activists, two NGOs, representatives of recognised teachers' associations, DI (SE), DI (PE), 2 Panchayat Sabhapatis, 2 GP Pradhans, 2 BDOs, 2 Guardians of primary children. State Project Director and representative of WB Board of Primary Education are permanent invitee members.

2. District Project Implementation Committee (DPIC) is a committee to liaison and coordinate with different departments/agencies at district level and to monitor the project implementation on a regular basis. District Magistrate is its Chairman, Chairman of DPSC is its Vice-Chairman and DPO, DPEP is its Member-Secretary. Other members of this committee include the district level officers of various development departments directly and indirectly connected with primary education.

3. District Pedagogy & Training Committee (DPTC) is composed of Chairman of DPSC as Chairman, DPO, DPEP as Member-Secretary and other members to chalk-out strategy and activities through DPEP interventions in the field of pedagogical renewal and capacity building of primary school teachers, etc. This is the apex committee in the district regarding policy decisions, selection matters and monitoring pertaining of all pedagogical and training interventions.<sup>(12)</sup>

### **Primary Education in West Bengal - A Profile**

Fifty five years back when the country attained its independence the education scenario was in a very dismal state. In 1951 out of a population of 36 crores only about 6 crores were literate, which means 16.67% was the rate of literacy. This led the constitution framers to include in the directive principle, "The State shall endeavour to provide within a period of 10 years from the commencement of the constitution for free and compulsory education for all students until they complete the age of 14 years" (Article 45). This was supposed to have been achieved by 1960. Even after 55 years we have not reached anywhere near the target. Over this period, in spite of definite efforts from all concerns, the target still remains elusive. At the same time we have no doubt that we made some progress in achieving the goal by extending educational opportunities at the primary level, removing the disparity between the urban-rural population as well as taking care to bring the children of less advantageous section into school.

In the year 1977 when the present Left Front Government took office, the focus of all developmental work was shifted to the rural areas of the state. It has, with all honesty and sincerity, implemented the land reform measures which resulted in a sea change in the village. Coupled with the land reform measures the three-tier panchayat system has transformed a large number of rural population into active members of the society. The above measures also increased the agricultural production of the state resulting in upliftment of the cities or the landlords. Aspirations have changed, people are longing for better quality of life and better education for their children. Total literacy movement in the state has changed the concept of their parents about education. The movement has also empowered the women to take the leadership positions and demand more education for their children. The people have become aware of the cultural activities and a sense of well being have developed. The Government effort of micro planning and giving more power to the democratically elected panchayat bodies ushered the hope of achieving universalisation of elementary education. A good management system with proper deployment of resource both human and financial can work wonder at this stage.<sup>(13)</sup>

**Table 19. Demography (Figure in lakh)**

Year	Total Population	Male	Female
1981	545.79	285.60	260.19
1991	679.83	354.62	325.21
2001	846.79	440.33	406.45

Year	Urban Population	Rural Population
1981	144.46	401.33
1991	186.22 (27.48 %)	473.61 (72.52 %)
2001	237.10 (27.99 %)	609.69 (72.01 %)

*Source : Census of India, 1981, 1991, 2001 (P)*

Following the recommendation of the Kothari Commission, in West Bengal minimum age of entering into the primary school has been lowered to 5 years in the

year 1991. For the improvement and expansion of the education system the single department of education was bifurcated into two, School Education and Higher Education, in 1977. The School Education Department was given the task of looking after the primary education, secondary education. Minister-in-charge along with the Minister of State and the Secretariat takes the policy decision in respect of all matters in the School Education sector. The Directorate implements the government policy through the Inspectors and the inspectorate located at the District Head-quarter and at Circle levels. The Sub-inspector of Schools is posted at a Circle. A Circle is an area of about half of a Development Block. 70-80 nos. of primary schools are there in a Circle.

The primary schools are under direct control of the District Primary School Council or the District School Board. State Government provides fund to the Council/Board for meeting all expenditure in respect of primary education including salary of the teachers. In the month of June, 1990 Government of West Bengal implemented the West Bengal Primary Education Act, 1973 with certain amendments by constituting at the State level West Bengal Board of Primary Education and District Primary School Council for different districts except those of 24-Parganas ( North ), 24-Parganas ( South ) and Hill areas of Darjeeling district. District Primary School Councils have been set up in North and South 24-Parganas in 1994. The West Bengal Board of Primary Education has been given the task of determining the syllabus as well as the course of studies to be followed in the primary schools. It would also supervise the functioning of District Primary School Councils. The task of preparing the Text Books is also lying with it. District Primary School Council set up at each district maintains and prepares register of primary schools, teaching staff of primary schools and maintains the service record of the teaching staff under its jurisdiction. It is also responsible for the development and expansion of the primary schools of the district. District Primary School Council is also the employer of the primary school teachers and is responsible for the payment of salary as well as the transfer etc. of the teachers. It is also responsible for maintenance of the primary school buildings either directly or through local authority.<sup>(14)</sup> For educational research and various training of teachers State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) has been established as an organisation directly under the School Education Department of Govt. of West Bengal.

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